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c.4







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## Cobblestones Don't Need Coffins

Our friend Nigel, light-footed nomad, graceful tumbleweed in the winds of change, never fails to arrive on the brink of unmade history. This began when he was twelve: hopping freights to The City--back then it was New York--and skipping from one golden city to another as if a gigantic game of hopscotch was being played without God's consent. As the fervor transplanted itself, so did Nigel; he made Chicago for the Seven and Frisco that stifling summer and most recently it would be London, Paris, Vienna, we were certain. So he was intrepid; so he was worldly-wise; so was he also financially suicidal.

Our friend Nigel had been skirting our territory for nearly a week now, avoiding us like the plague. Thus we were prepared when he finally approached us, with undiminishable confidence for food and lodging.

My vantage point at the upstairs window affords me the familiar spectacle of our friend Nigel striding up the path, bent nearly double under the burden of his prolific pack. It fairly bristles with paraphernalia: clanking pots, soup ladles, brass bugles, hat collections, folding easels, what not? Well, cobblestones, for one.

He looks like our friend Nigel, certainly; the proverbial Golden Girl Nigel. He is petite; undernourished; so imperially thin, in fact, that there is the unmistakable impression that instead of going to sleep at night, he just folds up. His feet are shod in bulbous leather boots, above which stick a good three inches of ankle. A Dickens' street urchin from toe to head--upon which resides a vintage bowler, at the same jaunty angle as his new-found confidence; an angle to be ignored. (Our friend is a connoisseur of hats.)

Under the hat, yes, nestled in a field of gilded curls, yes, beams our friend Nigel's beatific face. Nigel is, last of all and above all, a Golden Girl, with a face to make a poet weep.

And our friend Nigel strides up the path to our house, unaware of being scrutinized, oblivious to our summer fields and midnight forests and the primroses that line our path, which are only there if you deem them indispensable to the story. He beams primarily inwardly, thinking no doubt of smiles to come.

"Up here!" I call for the third time.

"I hear you," he says, barely audible, still bent over, still beaming at his feet.

"I'm up here."

"I know you are," he says, raising neither his head nor his voice. "I have a limited range of view under this pack. My neck bends back only so far, you know. So how are you? Long time no see."



"Come on in, come on in," I yell.

The steps sag with Nigel, creak protestingly as Nigel trudges up to the front door. I clatter downstairs to behold Nigel and his pack trapped firmly in the doorway.

"I'm trapped in the doorway," he observes dispassionately.

\*\*\*\*

We have to run the last fifty yards or so; the last half of our cowpasture and over a stretch of hot sand--in keeping with our vows to leap unconditionally and wholeheartedly into the water. This we do with abandon. The sun dances crazily in the sky; we rage into the oncoming surf drunk with fear and joy and agonized exuberance.

Here we all are: Chris and Marion and Charly and Hilary and myself and our friend, Nigel, needless to say. For whom the excitement proves too overwhelming and who, after barely getting wet, withdraws to the warm bench of sand that rims our merry cove. To watch, to drink our lethargic sunlight rather than our exhilarating sea. I am compelled to join him, propelled by his attractive unconcern to recline beside him, aching with the thaw of my numb limbs.

"Nigel," I begin, "I am aware of the enormity of the situation."

He smiles with vexation.

"So I'm little," he laughs, "So I'm frail and can't bear the grand icy rush that the ocean gives you. I still reject your noble compassionate bullshit."

"Ah, you're not shivering, are you?" I taunt, dissolving with love. "You are! Let me rub the warm healthy glow back to your limbs. There. And there. As for the enormity of the situation, you jumped to some revealing conclusions. No slight on your physique intended--"

"Scoundrel!" sighs Nigel, cheek against sand, responding to the rub of my strong hands.

"Have you been watching Marion?" I say conspiratorily. "I mean, you've only known him since you came. But he is fascinating to observe--we all do our share. We participate, of course, not being mere spectators--this not being a spectator sport. However, he doesn't begin to perform until he thinks nobody's watching."

"Doesn't he," frowns Nigel, "make cobblestones or something? Is that significant?"

"It all is. Or none of it is. Perhaps both. Personally, I love Marion in spite of or because of those damn cobblestones. He molds them meticulously from our supply of clay which, no doubt as Charly claims, could be put to worthier use. Some are spherical. Others are not. But they're hard and smoother than glass when he's finished--a delight to clasp in one's



palm. What he does with them is what leaves me so entranced."

"I'm baffled."

"He plants them. Not in every sense of the word, of course. He simply buries them from six to twelve inches down in this: our sand, and walks away as if nothing had transpired."

"It seems so lonely," Nigel reflects.

"It's audacious is what it is," I rejoin, "Sometimes the eeriest feeling possesses me. Right now, for instance, I can just feel those round black cobblestones suspended in this ocean of sand. Just suspended there, biding the time."

"The loneliness and audacity of genius," a voice breaks in without portfolio. Charly's tall shadow breathes across Nigel's prone body, stretches itself flat as she flops down beside us shooting sparks of icy salt water and nervous exhilaration. I feel a muscle in Nigel's back stiffen with indignation.

"Charlotte, you are a mental prince," I flatter her with expertise, "But relax. Nigel and I were enjoying a rare intimate rapport. You may only join us if you wish to reject your identity as Grand Duchess."

"Sure." She'd done it long ago as we all do now and then. It has become a personal joke between us.

Time slips by like sun-warmed silk through our fingers; our sea itself is blue silk stretched across some cosmic bosom, splits like silent silk with the boats that slip by. Aching with the beauty and borrowed warmth of our bodies, we all make love in the grass of our pasture until Marion spots a green stationwagon barreling down the dirt road that leads to our beach, and we collect the strewn clothes and depart.

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Charlotte, or Charly as she so adamantly prefers, is a loose bundle of nerves and wires. Her face betrays her every fleeting fancy like a strobe. She'd been a gingersnap of a kid when she first came, had the charm to listen to these ostracized old dreamers, incorporated herself swiftly into the scheme of things. I was delighted and awed. She is a tall bony kid with feathery red hair, scintillating eyes, and a lightning smile. She has the uncanny knack of rapport with each and all of us, can set us off giggling like schoolgirls. We love her and submit cheerfully as sounding boards to her rantings when she is on the rampage. As she now is. It is rumored that she and Nigel vie for my affection; siblings in rivalry, but I choose to pay no attention to them for the moment. It is futile for Nigel to ascend any imaginary



thrones: our gods are too fragile. Charly annoys him only because she reflects his own annoying tendencies to possess wholly and exclusively. Charly has learned to distribute her suffering equally among us in the most charming way. But Nigel, with the congregation of us all at dinner, around the fire, at our pasture and our beach, cannot disgorge of his poisons. Shout, scream, kiss, laugh, hiss, embrace. Such is our communal way. No Nigel, our dew-eyed lover, suffers covertly and exclusively to me, and I am compelled to divest him of his buried burdens alone; Charly elsewhere.

"Why do men and women reek such havoc on one another?" he asks me in anguish, "Everywhere it is the same. I had an affair in Marseilles--" And he relates a ragged weary case history that already outlasts its passing into the dustbin of literature.

Marion consumes my energy now like a continuous circuit courts the limits of compassion. He has paved a little pavilion with his smooth cobblestones next to the house, planted all around with perennials. If he is to die now, I believe I will bury him in this very spot. Or have him cremated, and install the urn of his ashes upon a little monument of cobblestones. I envision his forlorn face; the drooping heavy-lidded eyes, and have the sudden revelation that I would certainly kill myself if he were to die.

"Sad Sack!" I call from my rocker on our porch. It is the name I give him now, without malice, as I once called Nigel "Golden Girl," fully aware that he will ignore the ludicrous appellation. Confidentially, though: his dignity is merely arrogance for its own sake.

"Marion's upstairs," accuses Nigel, "with Charly."

Presently I attempt to smooth the torn edges that quiver in the air. "No matter. It is futile to make me jealous, Nigel. And Charly is a noble and deeply intelligent woman more than a century ahead of her time, who believes in human rights and takes them."

"Crap."

\*\*\*\*\*

Nigel knows he never has to suffer long. Wanderlust never meant running away, but running toward the dream of love that brings promise of sleep. Thus, Nigel, our friend still, is on the stairs on this, our velvet night, bent double under his prolific pack, unaware that I observe from above. He vows to never come back. How do I know? It is ghost-guesses. We will always only occupy the threshold of unmade history and that is not adequate. The pale illumination of our moon gives his face an unearthly veil of pain and beauty become one. Things: the house, the barn, cobblestones



have never seemed so strangely transfixed as in this eery moonlight.

"I love you, Jonathan," Nigel says quietly like a statue become articulate, so he must know that I watch him from my window, that I sit on this old brass bed next to Marion's slumbering body, thinking suddenly of all those damn cobblestones buried in the sand at our beach. "Good-bye."

Sharon Johnson



Sam

Why does it rain so much here?  
Maybe for us unstable people  
Who would cut off our thumbs in the guillotine;  
Or speak french in the lavatories;  
Or drown ourselves in puddles of loud music;  
Or warm ourselves in each other's words  
To escape the cold.

So much for why.

SUNNY MORNING



Freed

Oh, the Joy!  
Oh, the Glory!  
Oh, the Beauty!  
Oh, the once crowded caverns now emptied!  
FREED, FREED, my seed is FREED!  
The pain is gone and the need will stay,  
But no more ducking through the doorway.

It took much help--much help indeed:  
The moon just right, a warm, calm night,  
A silver tongue, some wine and some weed.

Oh, the Plead!  
Oh, the Need!  
Oh, the Feed!  
Oh, her once-wordy tongue now a searing scalpel!  
FREED, FREED, my seed is FREED!  
'Neath Plenilune's rays with much soft talk,  
I led her on a prenatal walk.  
The action was smooth and the union firm,  
Oh god, that lass knows how to squirm!

Oh, her Lips!  
Oh, her Kiss!  
Oh, her Sighs!  
Oh, the ecstacy of her smooth soft thighs!  
FREED, FREED, my seed is FREED!

Joel Neimi







Wondering.  
Why was I chosen  
to live this  
no-release eternity?

"But so do they." Wonder.  
But so are they." Bored.

Is there some-thing  
in the air?  
Or are we?  
dreaming?  
Is the universe?  
on the brink  
of finding the hole  
in itself?  
Or is it too?  
caught up  
in the grinding of its own perpetual gears.

Whirring.  
Wheezing.

#### Writing

Sputtering. But,  
nonetheless, going  
on  
and on  
and on and  
on and  
on and  
on and  
on...

We,  
of the universe, live  
for the ephemera.

Ephemera(s).  
the many, mini-existences  
that make up

an e t e r n i t y.

Or else---  
we hear the

Whirring.  
Wheezing.

Coughing.  
Sputtering.



and call it

Om...

or whatever.

We are not content

to let

the universe

define its-self.

Let it show its-self-self

to us, its hapless passengers.

We, with our other hands,

would just as soon

drive the universe.

But that is

like driving a refrigerator.

And so,

we ride on

and on

on and and on

on and on

and on

on.

Captive.

for eternity.

Eternity.

when does it start?

It's in the air.

It starts tomorrow.

Ed Classen may 1, 72







## Microcosm

Astoria; just a town to some and a world to others. A town built on the sometimes shaky proposition of survival depending on the rivers and land, with the elements on your side part of the time and other times you'd swear that they were out to get you. The undergrowth creeping out on one side and the river flooding and lashing out on the other.

The mighty Columbia; lined with piers, seagulls and roustabouts, one living off the other. Terminal piers with their cranes stabbing into the sky like defiant fingers, hawser tie-up points looking like metal heads with sardonicus grins, soon to have giant knotted turbans wrapped about their smiling skulls. The dredge is at work scooping up silt and ooze in huge metallic mouthfuls and then regurgitating onto its tender. A Monrovian freighter choogling through the water and rocking cormorants back and forth in its wake on its way to anchor up-river and light up at night so that it will resemble a handful of pearls anchored inscrutably to the waves. Many ships lined up on the river like courtesans in the ante-room of a monarch, waiting for his favor. The fog creeps in and these water borne behemoths begin their cries in the night; ululations wafting around and through the warp and woof of the fog shrouding the river. An affectionate fog hugging the river and the city and they intertwine like lovers in the Kama Sutra, they've felt each other many times before.

On a clear day the river goes on forever, thousands of hopes and dreams floating down to the big blue, and Ripple bottles going by with cryptic messages for the lost shores of unknown civilizations and despair washing down to the ocean, the water that will resolve anything that you want it to, the universal solvent.

A still to be resolved city creeping, amoeba-like, up from the water onto the hills; moving slowly away like a child learning to walk, but not yet ready to wean itself from its nurturing source. Old houses sitting on the hills with noble guardians of some past elegance, furnished by clipper ships spilling out the things of exotica and romance and crusty salts who would tell you "Wat it's like, mate, to ship 'round the horn."

Exotica and romance. And Trader Jake's will sell you anything that Jack's Picturehouse doesn't have. Bond street. Colorful community out on their front porches; "Howdy, how are you?" Long hair nodding and moustache grinning. La Bohemia. Astoria Psychedelia. Sitting in a Bond street laundromat pondering tha attendant. Does she really know how many famous people come in here to wash their shorts and sheets and write on their mental reflections? Astoria police driving around town in a squad car looking for a lost billfold and actually asking people if they've seen it. (Far Out!)



Refreshing girls on the streets, oblivious to the rain, ducking into steamy doors for who knows what mysterious rendezvous! Probably shanghaied and already on some tramp freighter named the African Queen smuggling opium into Canada!

Radical fishermen bugging congressmen, "We don't want those fuckin' Russians takin' our fish." Please, AMAX, build your plant somewhere else, we've already made all the impact on the environment that we want to (Estuaries away!). Loggers in calk boots getting drunk as hell and talking about the way they used to do it. State Police rookies giving tickets for faulty equipment (a screw missing from the headlight rim).

The Column; the world's largest collection of outdoor graffiti, Lewis and who? The end of The Trail. Will the undergrowth and the river take over or will this microcosm succeed? A handsome reward to the person who knows.

Tom Wolbert



Form isssgraham: TEACH HER

SOSEWSOW  
Crippled Myth-Ridden Odyssey Lady  
's me  
'n poetry,  
your "little Dickens' file.  
d'you  
scan me  
Crippled foot-Wise Writhing Lady?  
d'I  
Dylan Thomasseeee?

You groomee  
('s lightly)  
Lady-Old Cripple  
co-manned-her  
Hemmed in way, House manned  
classmundo  
TEACH HER  
seem eemee  
gwon.

Christie Counsman



JUDGEMENT OF BEAUTY

A man judges  
A woman's beauty  
By what she holds  
Without.  
But alas -  
Experience teaches  
A man to judge  
A woman's beauty  
By what she holds  
Within.

Ray Duncan





One Life  
in the day  
of  
Ed J. Classen  
Ed J. Classen  
appeared  
courtesy of  
Mater und Pater familias

FADE IN:  
INTERIOR OF WOMB. LABOR DAY.  
mater familias  
pater familias  
familias  
mater-pater  
secret discreet  
sweet  
and neat  
Ah!  
Ooooohhhh!  
i came to life  
life came to me  
  
mother-father-i  
we  
family  
whee!  
family!  
wee  
family  
mother-father-i  
i don't remember  
entering  
the womb  
so why should i remember leaving  
mother-father-i  
in pictures  
i don't remember  
now  
only mother-i  
stepfather-mother-i  
unfamily  
uno un family  
unnnnn!  
i learned to talk  
but did you have to teach me to cry  
crash!  
-i  
-i  
-i  
State of California-i  
and the judge created  
wards  
in his own image

orphanages  
were cages  
run by sisters  
and sustained on peanut butter sandwiches  
which we used  
as mortar  
during  
the first war  
  
"Father rescues orphan son  
from amorous nunn..."  
father-i-stepmother-brother  
can you see  
what confused me  
  
schools were  
schools  
schools  
were cages with radiators  
hardwood floors  
and poor ventilation  
designed to  
stifle me  
and prepare men  
to carry responsibilities  
and chips  
and rifles  
but i escaped  
scared  
scarred  
but alive and kicked  
tho  
no  
one  
remembered putting  
their foot down  
or  
reaching  
their hand out  
or down  
and i didn't ask



uncle sam  
called  
this morning  
left a message on the desk  
r.s.v.p.  
r.s.v.p.  
i replied  
and they gave me  
another number  
to go with my other  
RA  
18  
964  
104  
such a petty number  
a sensitive number

DISSOLVE TO WAR ROOM. MILITARY INTELLIGENCE HEADQUARTERS. FEATURING 18964104  
MAJOR PAIN (puffs on pipe, sensitively)  
18964104, Congratulations. You were responsible  
for the deaths of forty-four enemy  
your enemy,  
well-done

COVER NAME GATLIN (repugnantly)

Gee, sir  
is there  
any-  
-thing  
i  
can do  
for the families  
familias  
silliest notion?

DD 214  
you're free to go  
18964104  
you've done  
your country proud  
18964104  
you've done  
your number proud  
well done  
18964104

free  
i becomes me  
i become myself  
my self  
mine  
i am mine  
mine is mine  
mime is mime  
if no one listens  
mine is mime  
if no one hears

mime is mine  
if no one understands  
make mine  
mime

aquarian conception  
conceptive  
aquarian  
so you've come  
to  
this  
after twenty-three  
where did they go  
years

july 12  
in the year  
of our Lord  
nineteen-hundred  
seventy-one



now. a ship. against thw winds  
i sail and assaili, the salt  
must assalt. that's all.  
the world.....  
asks.....  
what do you want from.....  
me.....  
and i say.....  
feeling.....  
the numbers fade on my jersey.....  
world, i ask for tools.....  
on which.....  
to hang a dream.....  
and stuff.....  
to fill the canyon.....  
between me.....  
and they.....  
tools.....  
to open ears with.....  
and.....  
shine in eyes with.....  
tools.....  
with which to become.....  
free.....  
so i becomes me.....  
again and.....  
and again.....  
and again and.....  
again.....  
ad infinitum.....

i becomes me  
i-me-me-mine-i-mine-me  
i becomes me  
and  
i begat  
myself  
and  
myself begats  
my self-me  
me  
a mime

FADE DOWN, BUT NOT OUT.

-the beginning-



Haiku

How dust churns gently;  
Glints softly, at a window  
Full of sun. Like moths.

\* \* \* \*

Gawky bargelings  
Gak pookle; that God-awful  
Bish borealis.

Sharon Johnson







Greyhound Bus Depot

a lady  
selling cardboard cupcakes  
is much worse  
than a machine  
selling cardboard cupcakes  
because I can't kick  
her  
if she doesn't work.

Kelly Morgan



D.C. The Quarter Fold Rat

The paper lying on the concrete floor next to the toilet is dated October 23, 1970 and only contains six lines concerning Archie's condition. LeRoy left this morning with his wife who finally came to bail him out (after three days), and even though he was convinced that I am totally insane, he still said I could keep the paper. He's the only cell-mate I've had. He got drunk three nights ago and hit somebody in a bar for wearing a pair of tennis shoes that had the words "fuck Nixon" painted on the toes. "Fuck" on the left and "Nixon" on the right.

"How can anyone," LeRoy asked me, "with any red-blooded patriotism at all, keep from hitting a guy with shoes like that?" He broke the guy's nose. He also read the paper to me three or four times because when he first came in and found out that I wouldn't (he thought I couldn't) talk to him, he felt sorry for me. I only listened to the part about Archie though. They don't know if he will live or not. I feel pretty bad about that.

When LeRoy left, he put the paper on the edge of the toilet seat and tried to shake my hand, but I just stared at the third button on his shirt. He smiled and walked out, and when the guard slammed the cell door, the paper fell off the toilet onto the floor. LeRoy doesn't know about me and Archie.

If LeRoy bought that paper on the day he was arrested, then today must be the 26th, because he was here three days. I think.

II

At first they weren't going to give me any paper to write on. They said if I wouldn't talk, then why should they let me write? I know my rights. The policeman told me them. The one with the bald head held his gun pointing at me and the other one with the long brown coat read me my rights. I have the right to remain silent, so I am. I couldn't afford a lawyer, so they said they'd get me one, but that was a long time ago. I haven't seen him yet. I don't care though, because I don't think I'll talk to him either. I'm through talking to anyone. I think my mind has snapped, but I don't remember feeling anything like that.

Anyway, after I borrowed LeRoy's tie clip and started scratching my story on the wall, they said I could have the paper. But only one piece a day. I was going to save them up for a long time and write my story all at once, but when the old fat slob saw that I hadn't used the first piece, he wouldn't give me any more for that day. So I have to write my story one page at a time. I guess it will work out okay,



but sometimes I think of good things in the night and forget them by the next morning.

Tomorrow, I will start my story about D.C. I think then people won't hate me so much.

### III

I met D.C. when I was working in the converting department of the Crown Zellerbach paper mill in Wauna, Oregon. Archie was head adjustor at the time. Head adjustor just means that he was my boss on the floor. There were other bosses, but they have nothing to do with my story.

Converting is a very boring place to work. You stand there all day long running a big machine that makes paper napkins out of big rolls of paper. The most exciting thing that ever happens is, maybe you stub your toes once in a while, or else somebody leads a bunch of gawking people by your machine on a guided tour. Both things help take your mind off the napkins for a while, but you get so even then you hate them. They were endless columns of white soldiers, trying to kill me.

One night on graveyard shift, I was working along just like always when Archie came up and told me it was time for my coffee break and "This time dammit, you better not take more than ten minutes!" I always thought the ten minute rule was unfair because it took about three minutes to walk down to the coffee machine. Counting three minutes to walk back, that only left you with four minutes to have a smoke and a cup of coffee. Big deal. But I smiled at Archie anyway and went on my break. I can't blame him.

### IV

Yesterday, I started to tell you about D.C., but I got too much involved in telling you about Converting. Some days, I need two pieces of paper. I remember though. I was going on my coffee break.

When I got down to the end of the building by the coffee machine, I noticed that the door was open. It was the door where the guards came in to punch their clocks and I noticed it was open because rain was blowing in and it was pretty cold.

I was going to close it, but before I got there, this big, fat, wet, shivering rat came waddling in. At first I was scared a little bit, but that rat looked so cold, I decided not to kick him or anything like that. Then this other kid that worked in converting came walking up and saw the rat. I told him not to hurt it and he asked me what I thought he was going to do, step on it? We both laughed and the other kid walked upstairs to grab a smoke. I started to follow him when the



rat looked at me and said, "What's so funny?"

I didn't believe it. I mean I checked to see if the other kid heard, but he didn't because he just kept going up the stairs. So I looked back at the rat, who was going out the door.

V

I didn't sleep last night because that rat was going out the door all night long with me behind him. And to beat that, Fat Slob was late with my paper.

The rat went out the door into the rain and wind and I went after him. I asked him to stop and he did. He just stood there on the rainy, windy, steps and shivered up at me.

"You talk!" I said to him and he snarled a ratty little snarl. I guess he knew the look on my face because he said it was hard for rats to smile properly to humans. He really could talk! He told me that when he smiled it usually came out like a snarl because his mouth was shaped different than mine. I laughed and asked him his name, and he said D.C. because he was born on a big stack of paper that carried the label, "White D.C. Napkin, 1-Ply, 3-18 Rolls per set." I thought that was great because that was the kind of paper my machine, #33, used. He said right off that his sister, 1-Ply and his two brothers, White Nap and Per Set, were all dead. I thought he was taking my friendship a little too much for granted, but I was sad anyway and later realized that his forwardness was one of his best traits. D.C. always said what was on his mind.

I told him to come back again in two hours when I would have lunch, because I knew Archie would already be burning up. I had taken my ten minutes and then some. I ran back to my machine and got yelled at for running on the job and also for being late.

VI

After that first night, D.C. and I always talked when I had my breaks. I told him it probably wasn't safe for him to be inside the plant and he agreed. Then he reminded me that the plant was his birthplace and that in spite of the danger, he liked to come in every once in a while to look around.

He was a sentimental rat, and often talked of the good times he had as a youngster, playing with his brothers and sisters in the giant stacks of paper rolls. After they had died, (he never said they were killed), he had grown up quickly and moved out of the plant. He lived in a little red shack behind the plant where they stored fire hoses.



I went there a couple of times. I went there once when he invited me and once when he didn't show up at my ten o'clock break to talk with me. We always met on the back steps of the plant, and I'll never forget the day he didn't show up.

When I got outside with my cup of coffee and a piece of cheese, (I always took him something to eat while I smoked, because outside of an occasional pinch of snuff, D.C. never used tobacco), and he wasn't there, I ran to his shack and pounded on the door, afraid that something was wrong with him, or something had happened to him. He hollered for me to come in and hurry, so I did, and when I got inside I found him beneath a coil of fire hose, hopelessly trapped.

## VII

I had the dream again last night. That's about the tenth time since I've been here. I didn't want to write about it but I've decided that if I have it just one more time, I'm going to have to write it down. Maybe then it will go away.

Yesterday, I ran out of paper again too soon. I wish I didn't write so big, but since this whole mess started, I've changed a lot. Most of the time I shake like an old saw filer.

D.C. wasn't hurt by the fire hose that fell on him, but he was very upset. After I got him calmed down, he told me what happened. Some men had come in earlier and taken the hose to use for a fire drill. That's what he figured, because what else can you do with a fire hose? When the men brought it back, they didn't bother to stack it properly. D.C. wanted to straighten it and climbed up to do so, but said he couldn't budge it. When he started to climb back down, he knocked it off the stack and it landed on top of him on the floor. D.C. was a big strong rat, but that fire hose held him down as if he were a butterfly. I asked him if he thought he had any internal injuries, but he said no.

After that, we started making plans and looking around for another place for him to live. But we never found any place that suited him, so we gave up. I told him he better not climb on any more fire hoses and he just smiled. It still looked like a snarl.

I was getting back to work from my breaks late a lot then. I think maybe that's what started the trouble. Archie got too curious.



## VIII

This morning a lawyer in a brown suit came to talk to me and tell me that he would defend me in court if I would talk to him. I just looked at him. He brought a very pretty woman with him who was a psychologist or something like that from the county health office. She tried to get me to talk too. I looked at her just like I did at the lawyer, but she was so pretty, I almost smiled. I'm glad I didn't though, because after they left, the guard, that fat slob, teased me for at least a half hour before he gave me my paper. Finally, I stuck my fingers down my throat and threw up all over the iron bars. He slapped me once and gave me my paper. I know it's hard for him. He says I should be padded away for good. Maybe I should. I only know it's hard to argue with someone when you're not talking.

I've been writing so much about D.C. lately, that it's almost like he were still alive. If he was...But he's not! He's dead and I'll never see him or talk to him again as long as I live. When I think about how he died too much, I almost wish Archie would die too. The last I heard was what it said in LeRoy's paper.

I got a letter from my mother yesterday. She said how it is a sin not to talk like I am. She says if I talk, things will work out. I lost my faith in talking before D.C. was killed. Tomorrow, I'll write about how it happened and then my mother will know why I don't talk.

## IX

Today I write about the murder of D.C. Rat. The very same day that D.C. got trapped under the fire hose, I was late getting back on the job twice. Once after I saved D.C., and again at lunch break, when we were so engrossed in discussing the possibilities of making it big on D.C.'s gift of the English language. That's not the only thing we ever talked about though. We talked about everything: baseball, football, basketball, world problems, the moon shots, Spiro Agnew, and even the role that rats play in scientific study today. But that's not telling you how he was killed.

Anyway, after I was late coming back from lunch, Archie really blew his stack. He said he was going to find out what I did on my breaks if it killed him. That put a certain strain on the happy talks that D.C. and I were having. We both realized that I was an exceptionally open-minded human being who didn't mind talking to a rat, but that was not saying Archie would be the same. Besides, D.C. said that he wouldn't even have spoken to me the first time except that he was very depressed and he hadn't expected such a close relationship



to develop from it. I guess most people would have thought I was crazy, just like Archie did when he finally caught me talking to D.C., about a month later.

We were in our afternoon rap and just getting into a good debate on whether the earth was really round or not when Archie popped out the door followed by one of his subordinate adjustors. They had planned to catch me sleeping I guess, but when they saw me talking to a rat, they really flipped out. And the funny thing is, I just kept talking while they stood there and gawked, but after they appeared, D.C. never said a word.

X

Last night I had the dream again. I don't know if I can stand it much longer so I will have to write it down.

See, everything is very dark. Black dark, and I can't see a thing. I don't know if I'm laying down, standing up, or upside down or anything. There is just me and the darkness. I don't feel anything. Then, way off on all sides, this music starts up, but I'm so far away I can't make out the words or the tunes, just the rhythm. Like jungle drums, louder, louder, louder! And wherever I am in the black dark, or whatever I am, I move through the void, and the music gets closer and closer. Once I tried going away from it but it got louder and closer anyway and had the exact same ending as always. Anyway, it keeps getting louder and louder and pretty soon I burst into vision and light and I'm at the converting plant hiding behind a machine. All the adjustors are dancing around a small smoking fire, and they were all naked. As they dance, they are singing a chant.

It goes: D.C. D.C.

The weirdo's pet rat  
We ran him through a folder  
And smashed him flat.

They are evil and I look at the fire and see a rat tail sticking out from it and I smell D.C.'s burnt flesh. And they are dancing and screaming and jumping and sweating and then blood starts to gush from their eyes and mouths. I notice that every one of them has a flat penis, about the thickness of a 1-Ply 52 $\frac{1}{4}$  Fixturefold. And I scream, "Two dimensional blind cocksuckers!" and in my hand is an axe, and I chop at them but they start to melt into the floor. A thousand white rats come raining from the ceiling with their teeth bared and I scream that I didn't kill D.C., but they don't believe me and they eat both my hands off. Here I always wake up crying.



XI

The lawyer came back today but he didn't bring the pretty woman with him. He showed me in the paper he brought with him, that Archie is dead. He died early this morning. Now I don't know what to do. He says I'm in big trouble. I guess I am, but I feel pretty funny. I was writing this story down so everyone would know how cruel Archie was when he killed D.C. I was going to tell how he got so happy from killing that rat and breaking my mind. If I wrote about it, people would like me more than Archie, and the jailer, fat slob, would quit being so mean to me. Now it's no use. I'm tired...

I didn't do it. I mean it wasn't really me who did it. It started in the morning because I was on the day shift. D.C. had been dead about two or three weeks. I do know that on the night before, I had the dream. The same one I wrote about yesterday. A belt broke on my machine and I could have fixed it myself. Sometimes I broke as many as ten or twelve belts in one shift alone and never called an adjustor, because it's easy to fix a broken belt. It made me feel good to fix my own machine.

But this time a belt broke and I called for Archie. I told him that I couldn't fix it because part of the old one was jammed in the knives. He frowned for a minute, but then he crawled under my machine. That was his job.

XII

The dream happened again last night. Now I know I'm crazy. I decided I'm tired of writing this story. I don't want to write how I killed Archie. If I do, then no one will like me and I'll never get out of this place. I'm tired of this jail cell and fat slob.

In very easy to understand English, I waited until Archie stuck his hand up in the knife drum to get out the jammed belt that wasn't there. I lied to Archie. And when he stuck his hand up in that machine, I pushed the main drive start button with one hand and threw the clutch wide open with the other. Number 33 ate up his arm. When it got to his shoulder, the knife drum stopped spinning and the whole machine started vibrating and shaking the floor. I could hear one long howl like an animal from somewhere and blood came from underneath the machine. I looked up and everybody was running toward me yelling real loud. They looked crazy or something, so I ran from them.



I ran out of the building, across the entire mill, a half mile to the highway, and two of the three miles to my house, without stopping. I felt like I was flying. Then I fell down in the ditch and hit my head on a piece of wood. The next thing I remember is the policeman pulling me up by my hair and asking me my name. I didn't tell him though.

#### XIII

LeRoy came back last night. He was drunk again. They started to put him in my cell like last time, but he threw a tantrum and fat slob had to whap him on the head with his dinky baseball bat. I think he found out what I did to Archie.

I don't blame LeRoy for not liking me. If I was someone else, I wouldn't like me either. They put LeRoy two cells down with three other drunks. He keeps hollering how Archie had a wife and kids. D.C. had a family too. At least he said his mother was still alive.

Fat slob said this is my last piece of paper. Tomorrow I get to leave here. They're taking me to Salem. I knew someone who went there once for drawing pictures on his neighbor's walls.

My lawyer is standing in front of me now and he said he wants to talk to me. I told him to get out of the light, ~~that~~ I'd be through in a minute.

Ron Robinson









